



Governor's Office for
Children and Families



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Georgia Chapter



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Kids Left in Cars: State Agencies Warn of the Dangers

From Kidnappings to Heatstroke, Officials Urge Greater Awareness For Georgia's Youngest Citizens

ATLANTA, Ga., (May 10, 2013) – The leaders of six state agencies and three partner organizations are calling for parents and caregivers of children to have greater awareness of the dangers associated with leaving kids unattended in vehicles. In the shadow of the Gold Dome today, officials held a news conference to express their concerns and demonstrate how fast temperatures can rise inside a closed vehicle, especially in the spring and summer, and especially in Georgia.

“We are here today to save lives as leaving children unattended in vehicles has become the leading cause of non-traffic vehicular deaths in the nation,” said Bobby Cagle, commissioner of Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. “We’re told that more than half of all vehicle-related heatstroke deaths in children are caused by a child accidentally being left in a car, and more than 30 percent are from a child getting into a hot car on their own.” Cagle said one way to remember the warnings is with the word **ACT**: Avoid heatstroke; Create reminders; Take Action.

Agencies participating in the news conference included the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning; Georgia Department of Public Health; Georgia Department of Human Services; Georgia Department of Public Safety; Georgia State Patrol; Governor’s Office of Highway Safety; and the Governor’s Office for Children and Families. Supporting partners included Safe Kids Georgia, Emory Center for Injury Control and the Georgia Chapter of the American Association of Pediatrics. Partnering with Safe Kids Worldwide, the agencies also presented a Webinar Friday morning for child care providers, caregivers and parents.

In an effort to prevent such tragedies, officials urged all parents and caregivers to remember three things:

- **NEVER** leave a child in a vehicle unattended
- **ALWAYS** lock your car and put the keys out of reach --- even at home
- **ALWAYS** call 911 if you see a child left in a vehicle

“It is never safe to leave children alone in cars, no matter what the temperature, not even for a minute,” says Brenda Fitzgerald, M.D., commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Health. “Children's body temperatures warm at a rate 3 to 5 times faster than adults putting them at a much higher risk for heat related illness. The bottom line is never leave a child alone in a car. Period.”

Leaving a child alone in a car can lead to an unintentional child death or serious injury," said Clyde L. Reese, III, commissioner of the Georgia Department of Human Services. "Through public education and collaboration we hope to have a lasting impact on the safety of Georgia's children."

“A warm Georgia day can turn a car interior into a deadly place in minutes,” said Harris Blackwood, Director of the Governor’s Office of Highway Safety. “We ask all Georgia parents to ‘Look before you Lock’ anytime children are present.”

“Do not leave children and animals unattended,” stated Colonel Mark W. McDonough, Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety. “Teach children that a car or truck is not a play area and be sure to lock your vehicle.” He also reminds drivers to make it a regular practice to check the back seat and back floor area for children and animals each time you exit your vehicle. If you come across a child left in unattended vehicle, please do not hesitate to contact 911.

One of the speakers at today’s news conference was Jenny Stanley, a local parent who in August, 2010, lost her six-year-old daughter Sydney when the child became trapped inside the family’s car while parked in their garage. “I had always heard the term ‘died of a broken heart,’ but I thought it was just a saying. I now know that it is an actual physical pain and I felt like dying,” said Ms. Stanley.

About the Georgia Department of Public Health

The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) is the lead agency in preventing disease, injury and disability; promoting health and well-being; and preparing for and responding to disasters from a health perspective. In 2011, the General Assembly restored DPH to its own state agency after more than 30 years of consolidation with other departments. At the state level, DPH functions through numerous divisions, sections, programs and offices. Locally, DPH funds and collaborates with Georgia's 159 county health departments and 18 public health districts. Through the changes, the mission has remained constant - to protect the lives of all Georgians. Today, DPH's main functions include: Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Maternal and Child Health, Infectious Disease and Immunization, Environmental Health, Epidemiology, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Emergency Medical Services, Pharmacy, Nursing, Volunteer Health Care, the Office of Health Equity, Vital Records, and the State Public Health Laboratory. For more information about DPH, visit www.dph.ga.gov

About the Georgia Department of Public Safety

The Georgia Department of Public Safety oversees the day-to-day operations of the Georgia State Patrol (GSP), Capitol Police and the Motor Carrier Compliance Division (MCCD). GSP troopers investigate traffic crashes and enforce traffic and criminal laws on the state’s roads. Capitol Police officers prevent and detect criminal acts, and enforce traffic regulations throughout Capitol Hill. MCCD officers conduct safety inspections of commercial motor vehicles and inspect highway Hazmat shipments.

About the Georgia Department of Human Services

The Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for the delivery of human services throughout the state. The Department serves Georgians through regulatory inspection, direct service and financial assistance programs. DHS includes the Division of Aging Services, the Division of Child Support Services, and the Division of Family and Children Services. The 8,000 employees manage over 60 programs in all 159 counties. The DHS mission is to strengthen Georgia by providing individuals and families access to services that promote self-sufficiency, independence, and protect Georgia's vulnerable children and adults.

About Governor's Office of Highway Safety

The Mission of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety is to educate the public on traffic safety and facilitate the implementation of programs that reduce crashes, injuries, and fatalities on Georgia roadways.

About Bright from the Start

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.decal.ga.gov.